

LATENT TRANSPARENCY OF VIACHESLAV IVANOV'S WRITINGS

*Denis Mickiewicz*

The concerted efforts of scholars based mainly in Rome, St Petersburg and Moscow reproduced in print and on the internet almost all the writings by and about Viacheslav Ivanov (1866-1949) with ample biographical and bibliographical commentary. This achievement promised to fulfill a century-long hope that the recovery of missing links in his corpus will clarify and unify its esoteric content. The meaning of the works remains, however, as enigmatic as when the author first appeared on the cultural scene after two decades of intensive studies of antiquity in European capitals.<sup>1</sup>

Ivanov's magisterial command of ancient and modern versification and his formidable theories of high-minded creativity raised the intellectual prestige of the Symbolist movement.<sup>2</sup> His unprecedented erudition and syntheses of diverse humanistic traditions and complex poetry and prose are invariably noted in textbooks, historical surveys and numerous memoirs. His challenging

---

<sup>1</sup> Ivanov joined the Moscow and Petersburg symbolists in 1905, at the mature age of 39, when that movement was in full swing. Hailed, then, as the most learned among his peers, he is regarded by many as the most erudite ever among Russian literati. Yet the works of his peers, pupils and successors reflect, if ever, only the faintest traces of his influence. His initial renown ended with his stay in St Petersburg when the poet decided, in 1912, to move to Moscow, primarily as a religious thinker. Except rejecting positivism and naturalism, until the collapse of their movement, roughly at that time, Russian symbolists never developed a unified view of their mission and subject matters. There was much talk about "creating life" (*zhiznetvorchestvo*), but Ivanov attached to that term an entirely different meaning – that of spiritual ascent promising a radiant world view and *amor vitae*.

<sup>2</sup> No Russian literatus had as profound a knowledge of the relation of classical philology to Biblical, Byzantine and Medieval and to modern native and European culture, symbolism, and versification. And no expert had a similar grasp on as many subfields as did Ivanov. The polyglot wrote and published in seven languages; he dominated in symposia on these subjects, especially on the theory of theatre and poetry. During his last twenty five years in exile, he was highly esteemed by a coterie of remaining humanists in Italy, Germany, France, England, Spain and Switzerland, eager to publish in their beleaguered elite journals his rigorous defense of the thesaurus of World Culture.

essays, and his poems, were reviewed and discussed but never explored in depth. No professional found them practical enough to use in his or her own creativity. The ideas of the “famous Ivanov” have never been developed further, and no major study about his work appeared during his lifetime. Now he is virtually unread in Russia, and almost unheard of abroad.<sup>3</sup>

Further accumulations of scholarly data cannot save Ivanov from oblivion. Though unquestionably necessary the findings of specialists are thematically random; they do not relate to each other and furnish little perspective on the diversity and cohesion of his works. Meanwhile, the mass of research grows more and more labyrinthine and too voluminous to be surveyed. It is for Ivanov specialists to decide whether a change of focus from external facts to content will help to redress the century-old misesteem, and if the scholars’ collective coordination of the facets of his work will then show it as a substantial contribution to world humanism.<sup>4</sup> Ivanov gave ample evidence that his main objective was to demonstrate the longing of man to engage in spiritual experiences. In his opinion, these experiences are the fount of humanist cultural aspiration. What is saved in its thesaurus is one of humanity’s oldest and strongest bonds. Preserving this legacy became impossible in Russia after World War One and increasingly difficult in Western Europe.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> The *Correspondence between Two Corners* by V.I. Ivanov and M.O. Gershenzon (1921) is a singular exception. Its 2006 edition and learned survey by Robert Bird list over a dozen separate and anthologized publications in Russian and eighteen translations into nine European languages published between 1926 and 1991. These were episodic bursts of interest in the elegant polemic on the role of culture during and after its titanic crises. The quality of the defenses of *thesaurus* versus *tabula rasa*, based, respectively, on the strategy of citing versus that of metaphors, earned the interlocutors a high esteem among beleaguered humanists, especially in Germany, Italy, France, Spain and England. It was the only text of Ivanov ever discussed by them. The debate ended unresolved, but in the words of Bird, “it established the space necessary for creative interpretation of the cultural situation in Russia and in Western Europe. Thus, being, itself incredibly rich on thoughts, it became even more enriched by all the responses it received from very diverse readers.” Nevertheless, according to the editor, even this classic “was never conclusively read.” R. Bird (ed.), *Viacheslav Ivanov – Mikhail Gershenzon, Perepiska iz dvukh uglov*, Moscow, 2006, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> This subject is well introduced, in English, in Emily Wang’s substantial article “Viacheslav Ivanov in the 1930: the Russian Poet as Italian Humanist”. *Slavic Review*, vol. 75, no. 4, Winter 2016, p. 896 - 918.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of Ivanov to Ernst Robert Curtius of February 27-8, 1932. Further on in this letter Ivanov writes, “the hero has died. We now fight as in Homer’s tale about the body of the hero, which is already lifeless, so that the hordes of the possessed not rob it from us as we fall to or devolve to embalm and mourn and bury in order to praise gloriously at future memorial occasions. <...> I am speaking about the humanism that is mortal and not about the soul of

Today, after so many leading doctrines have been revealed as bankrupt, it may be opportune to reexamine what enhances man's creative drive from Ivanov's angle of view. Let us consider some of the difficulties in clarifying his approach.

1. Mastering Ivanov's texts is a daunting task. His forms are rigorously clear, but the narratives seem convoluted. The quasi-religious directions can be sensed, but the destinations of the directions are never specified. Such hurdles can, however, also be viewed positively. If scrutinized, the apparent convolutions reveal connections of multilinear messages. And keeping blank the object and topography of spiritual aspiration gives each individual reader the freedom to interpolate his own notion of the highest realm. This is a capital point in Ivanov's doctrine, and it has been grossly overlooked. Another reason (also unconsidered) was Ivanov's insistence on reporting, however metaphorically, only the really experienced situations and feelings. Lacking the mystical gift of Biblical prophets or Dante, he recorded only his means of *ascending* toward and what he could recall in his descent from his glimpses into higher reality. He adhered to Goethe's "firm decision to strive relentlessly toward the Highest Being" (*Faust*, Part Two, Act One).

Unraveling Ivanov's hermeticism guarantees, if not everyone's acceptance, at least a discourse with a common viewing on a level commensurate with his lofty problematics. Reexamining the original doubts about Ivanov's personal and poetic forthrightness and his scholarly and religious veracity may stimulate productive consultation among "ivanologists."<sup>6</sup> Ivanov's penchant to feature conflicting philosophic traits made doubts about his worth more intense. Most of his legitimizations of the coexistence of such traits are categorically at odds with commonly held ideals, notions of what is relevant, trustworthy and real.

2. Complexity is not the deepest cause of Ivanov's alienation from his readers. And it is clearly not the proverbial "genius versus mediocrity" issue. The age of Ivanov boasts many breakthroughs in the arts and sciences, and

---

Hellenism that is immortal." Vjaceslav Ivanov, *Dichtung und Briefwechsel aus dem deutschsprachigen Nachlass*, M. Wachtel publication, Mainz, 1995, pp. 57-58. See also Ivanov's correspondence with Martin Buber (*ibidem*).

<sup>6</sup> The impression of lacking forthrightness, particularly shocking with a lyricist, arose mostly as a response to the novelty of Ivanov's manner. The history of art is full of such examples. He admitted in a private letter that his literary essays contain no references to his personal religiosity. They were addressed to "heathen" aesthetes, while his poetry does reveal his convictions, fully and from many angles. (Letter to Evsenii Shor, of August 20, 1933, *Simvol*, 53/54, Paris-Moscow, 2008, pp. 398-399).

plenty of brilliant authors and readers were eager to be in contact with him. Despite Ivanov's frequent calls for a nation-wide (*vsenarodnoe*) creativity, his works attracted only experienced and refined readers used to rarefied texts. The question why, then, did these intellectuals stop pondering Ivanov's multi-layered works before understanding them can lead to productive hypotheses about his doctrine. His penchant for "archaist" modes and sources diverged too far from prevalent conventions. This prompted him to withhold the customary writers' self-revelations, and not to specify the destination areas of his *transcensus*. His alien conception of "true reality" (*ens realissimus*) differed too radically from the pragmatic norms pursued by his contemporaries. The poetic genre permits encoding a more accurate account of ineffable mental experiences. These flushes were not momentary whims or conceits (perfectly suitable for fiction), but timeless feelings and dilemmas that are also confirmed by scrupulously selected analogues or likenesses from the thesaurus or depository of world culture. Such impersonal objectivity was mistaken for evasiveness, and it precluded the sympathetic introspection by serious readers.

3. Ivanov's verses express his nurtured insights, and his essays elucidate his poetics. Paradoxically, his idiosyncratic writing was unmistakably original, while he never put on center stage his personal Ego. Individualism, he argued, should be superseded by supra-personal, cultural all-human values. While private incubation of spiritual experiences (*keleinost'*) is essential, creative minds need to go further. They can traverse the confines of solipsism, join the world of great predecessors, and be heard, on that level, by future beholders. Ivanov called the common cult of conceited self-contained orientation "restricted (*ogranichennyi*) individualism". He called for pre-renaissance medieval and early romantic transcendental approaches when Man was not "the measure of all things." Thus, the essence of humanism was differently conceived by Ivanov than by most of his and our contemporaries. Instead of promoting individualism and rationalism, he argued that faith in a Highest Being or God has always bonded communities, nations, and humanity by inspiring the greatest works of art.

4. Ivanov coined, in 1908, a Latin neologism *realiora* to denote *realia* that are higher and more durable than our daily earthly things. The term never caught on; it involves a cumbersome conflating of supra-segmental and supra-personal matters with their tangible manifestations (his formula for that was *realiora in rebus*). That inclusion stretches the common conception of "realism" across a greater philological space. Looking at symbolic abstractions of experiences manifested *in medias res*, the condensed lofty items become integral parts of texts, independently recognizable as icons. Thus, abstractions of experiences become inseparable from actuality.

In concretization of a state of the soul (ekphrasis), a fact trapped in its meaning is no longer a plain fact but an *event*, or more precisely a co-existence in its reflective act and its semantic and artistic completeness. Then, the meaning of the event, acquired by speculation, turns into the event of a meaning. I.e., that “meaning of the event” becomes “the event” of a historical life.<sup>7</sup>

In aggregate, such icons constitute a mosaic *terra firma*, a solid building material for articulate, scientific, religious or artistic discourses. That – half phenomenal and half noumenal – material fills a distinctive stratum between the two traditionally divided ontological realms of “heaven and earth”. To Ivanov, these are not antagonistic entities; their constant intersections form, on paper or in oral discourse, a concrete stratum. He calls the conscious operations on this level “realistic symbolism”. Naturalism, as well as fiction and fantasy are, in his view mere trifles, unless they serve transmittable emblematic ends. Like *Pilot Stars*, the title of his first collection of poems (1903), that stratum serves to represent the endless mobile, universal guides of man’s orientation in his navigation of behavioral, moral, and creative issues.

5. Liberty, our most controversial gate to unlimited choices, became Ivanov’s life-long preoccupation. From youthful stirrings for political freedom to studies of the libertinism of orgiastic cults and true freedom in the divine Imperium, these issues never left his desk. Toward the end of his life, while working *simultaneously* for the Vatican as a translator of the Psalms and on his unfinished proto Slavic Byzantine parable “Svetomir”, Ivanov reedited the German version of his dissertation on pre-Dionysian cults.<sup>8</sup> These cults sprang up, he claims, in different forms (mostly on funerary occasions), on various Aegean and Mediterranean islands well before the emergence of their common name. Their inextinguishable orgiastic spirit captured civilized cities like Athens and it was celebrated there for a millennium. And this spirit still persists, in different forms, notwithstanding the often tragic and murderous consequences and despite official political or clerical discouragement.

6. To gather symbolic affinities of supra-individualist events by juxtaposing historic facts, Ivanov put aside his previously obtained knowledge of their chronological and topographic origins and contingencies. Positivist historians regard such startling omissions as “poetic leaps” and reject his

---

<sup>7</sup> K.G. Isupov, *Estetika F.A. Stepuna*, in F.A. Stepun, *Sbornik statei*, ed. V.K. Kantor, Moscow, 2012, p. 296.

<sup>8</sup> See Ivanov’s 380 page book, *Dionysos und die vordionysischen Kulte*, edited and revised by Michael Wachtel and Christian Wildberg, finally appeared in Tübingen in 2012. This edition supersedes all previous Russian versions.

comparative connections as scientifically useless baggage. In turn, Ivanov ranked meanings and images held in common memory, more highly than the empirical data of perishable contingencies. Human acts of transcendence, memory, and dreams make the same leaps constantly. Yet, the coincidental patterns of affinities form ritualistic ties in civil and religious communities. Archeological excavations confirm the likelihood that spiritual rites, especially dirges, had spawned, in their further developments, artistic articulation of a given spirit in plastic, graphic, musical, and vocal art forms.

Punctilious selection by Christian churches admitted many “Apollonian” elements and discarded the Dionysian ones which Ivanov found to be even deeper rooted in racial memory. Some Orthodox believers accused him of satanic efforts to cover the evils of Dionysism (*dionisiistvo*) by presenting parallels between Dionysos and Christ (e. g., death and eternal resurrection, and suffering which, he wrote, was overlooked by Nietzsche). Celebrations of Eros, much like the cravings for freedom or victories, are inextinguishable movers of men. Despite the dangers of chaos, insanity or murder, they are inextinguishable tokens of Dionysiac absolute freedom. Ivanov, therefore, welcomed and praised the Apollonian boundaries for restoring order after the excesses of rages and boundless enthusiasm. To strengthen creativity, he advocated a balance between impulses of Platonic “righteous madness” and reasoned craftsmanship. Thus, his own work, perhaps paradoxically, combines free spiritual dynamics with the rigidity of classical forms of its expression. Harmony is as indispensable for humanity as Rhythm.

7. Ivanov allots a different role to rationality than did his academic and his avant-garde peers. While rational reasoning is indispensable, particularly in relating intoxicating (*khmeliashchie*) moments, he curbs the customary dominance of empirical reasoning.<sup>9</sup> Let aesthetic tastes differ concerning the Dionysian/Apollonian balance. What matters, is evidence that conveys an analogous, mutually confirming, movement of a vertically oriented spiritual aspiration (*dukhovnaya vertikal'*). God and Man, he repeats after Vladimir Soloviev, are on that same vertical. Researching the manifestations of the vertical traffic of human ascent and divine descent, as a historian, philologist, philosopher, AND poet, Ivanov found its countless expressions to be mostly extra-rational. They are unconscious supra-lingual wafts, toward a

---

<sup>9</sup> During his years in Italy, Ivanov definitely emancipated himself from the rigors of the positivist discipline of Theodor Mommsen’s historic-philological faculty. He had reasons to suspect that Mommsen would not pass his defense of the work “contaminated” by his growing interest in pre-Dionysian myths which continued for the rest of his life.

Supreme Being.<sup>10</sup> Dante practiced this approach; Goethe did; and so did the “confessor of his soul”, Vladimir Soloviev. Symbolist techniques allow infinite emotional and rational calibrations in the verbal depiction of what could be remembered of this waft. Ivanov wrote in an epistolary dialogue,

I am used to roaming in the ‘forest of symbols’, and I understand the symbolism in a word no less than in a kiss of love. There is a verbal signification of an inner experience, which it seeks and craves. People cannot give each other anything better than a reassuring confession of their clairvoyant snatches of a higher spiritual consciousness, be they only an intimation. One must beware of one thing, however: not to lend to these communications, these confessions, a character of compulsion by turning them into the achievement of reason. The latter is *compulsory* by nature, whereas the spirit breathes where it wants. Word-symbols of a person’s inner experience must truly be the children of freedom. Like a poet’s song moves [people] without compelling, so they should move the spirit of listeners, without subordinating their conviction the way a proven theorem does.<sup>11</sup>

Here, the universal simile “a poet’s song” aptly illustrates the verbal potential of symbols of inner experience. They move people without rational compulsion. Behind the modest bard image, there is a complex combination of author / performer / vocal dynamics and timbres / lexical articulation / melodic range / rhythmic pulses / harmonic colors / ambience reverberation / and all kinds of listeners. Each instance in each “song” entails an inimitable balance of factors plus a multitude of psychological and sensory effects. Separately, these factors may be consciously considered; but in concert the complexity of bundles of inputs creates a supra-conscious impact. The infinitely varied results, may yield high or low satisfaction, but the ages old principle of that act remains the same.

8. Ivanov combed diligently through world culture, selecting and combining bits of extraordinary evidence into conceptual paradigms. And he transgressed customary norms of research by liberating historical and literary thinking from the traditional restriction of verifying facts to the coherence of their chronological and spatial provenance. This liberty also left his deductions open to charges of being unscientific, i.e. untrustworthy. Whereas fantasizing artists can still delight, scholarly realists are expected to conform to

---

<sup>10</sup> Russian language has two synonyms for knowing: – *znat'* and *vedat'*. The first refers to scientific knowledge and the second connotes an addition of an aesthetic moment and that of will. It is closer to the act of observing than to that of description. And it was a major general impuls for man’s activities (cf. travel, pilgrimage, personal contact, etc.).

<sup>11</sup> Letter 3 in V. Ivanov-M. Gershenzon, *Perepiska iz dvux uglov* (Correspondence Between two Corners), ed. R. Bird, Moscow 2006, pp. 15-16.

the norms of verifiability and prove authenticity and validity. As no one can authenticate deity-inspired transcendental experiences, Ivanov resorted to proving the veracity of his extrapolations and conclusions by citing and alluding to recognized canonic chef d'œuvres that confirm his points. This relatively early step on Jacob's Ladder, is still within the realm of "common reality" and it lends itself to empirical examination. Unwilling to avoid issues that cannot be empirically proven, Ivanov indulged in poetic license, but only to depict metaphorically certain unfathomable realms. Unlike Dante, he could not imagine entering hell and paradise directly, but he contemplated and compounded proofs of mystical or emotional transcendent experiences. We must remember that he was rigorously trained to extrapolate meaning of unearthed archeological items and inscriptions.<sup>12</sup> He applied the same meticulous approach to the literary texts he studied and fashioned together with his own transmissions of spiritual experiences. In this way, the objectifying recording (*zapis* and *obrabotka*) lends itself to empirical observation. After decades of decoding and examining monuments, inscriptions and myths, and translating Greek tragedies, Ivanov concluded that the Dionysos/Apollo dyadic relationship represents a basic, primordial, psychologically complementary unity, inherent in truly tragic characters and plots. The principle of that dyad persists in all epochs and cultures as a perennial part of human nature, when individuals confront irreconcilable and fateful moral and existential dilemmas. Ivanov unfolds this proposition explicitly in his analyses of the works of Vergil, Dante, Petrarch, Goethe, Novalis, and especially, Dostoevsky, and, as he predicted, in his 1902 diary entry, "in a series of sonnets" (II, 771).

9. Ivanov focused on his notion that substantially analogous paradigmatic experiences recur throughout history in different cultures and in individual guises. Again, their perceivable commonality is a profound unifier of mankind. Attention to this fact supersedes his focus on historical distinctions. The chronological and locational gaps between the selected events are obvious, but in human memory, spirit or dreams, such leaps are common. Affinities, or "conjunctions of the mind", are needed in public life; men are free

---

<sup>12</sup> After two years of study at Moscow university the laureate student completed the nine semester curriculum at the world's strictest historical-philological faculty established by Theodor Mommsen at the University of Berlin. Most noteworthy are the five semester courses taken in *Quellenkunde* (Science of sources). It teaches how to deal with incomplete data found without their context. It helps explain why one source is preferable to another, how to convert antique information to a modern understanding and how to extrapolate meaning from fragments of objects or scripts.



to emulate or disrupt them, but history offers reminders of such possibilities, and Ivanov cherished these sublime occasions. In retrospect, it is not surprising that already in the 1890's, in the course of dutifully writing (in Latin) his doctoral dissertation on Roman administration, Ivanov developed a passion for an entirely different topic – Dionysus.<sup>13</sup>

He found in the very diversities of age, origin, and settings of his sources a new supra-personal dimension, a large-scale world outlook on time (*bol'shoe vremia*, in M. Bakhtin's terms). Short-term individual experiences belong to the class of perishable things. But they matter to Ivanov as carriers of lasting and universal recurrences. Hence, all his symbols are designed to advance consciousness from reality to higher reality (*a realia ad realiora*). He, thereby, deals with "large chronotopes" (Bakhtin's term), with large clusters of everlasting matters that surround us: cosmic, natural, mythological or religious items in long time spans. This dimension penetrates individual and collective consciousness, more like Freud's "super-ego", rather than a tool of political or commercial propaganda. It departs from categories descriptive of particular coteries, social groups or nations toward the universal level of human mentality. (See his melopea *Chelovek*, 1939). This gigantic extension of the meaning of "reality" admittedly involves heavy *conjecturing* – also an ancient human practice. In Ivanov's view, meditation on it may be more difficult, but is even more important, than traditional case-by-case studies. Hard as it is to diagnose and transmit conjectures about the workings of the mind, but even clinical medicine must often do that. According to Karl Jung,

when we are attempting to describe a single psychic event, we can do no more than present an honest picture of it from as many angles as possible. <...> The psychology of the unconscious and any description of the process of individuation encounter comparable difficulties of definition".<sup>14</sup>

Ivanov's multifaceted approaches to the human spirit also require philologists to "present an honest picture of it from as many angles as possible". But unlike psychiatry, "ivanology" still needs to determine its central subject,

---

<sup>13</sup> Ivanov decided to cancel the defense of his Latin dissertation. It got published in 1910, in St. Petersburg. As far as I know, no one has read it, and he never referred to it. But he did give up a respectable doctorate and a highly promising academic career, which made it difficult for him to earn a living, especially in exile.

<sup>14</sup> C. G. Jung, *Man and his Symbols*, N.Y. , 9<sup>th</sup> imprint 1983, p.164. A substantial comparison between Jung's and Ivanov 's conceptions of archetypes is provided by S.D. Titarenko, *Ot arkhetaipa – k mifu. Bashnia kak simbolicheskaya forma u Viach. Ivanova I K.G. Junga*, in *Bashnia Viacheslava Ivanova i kul'tura serebrennogo veka*, St Petersburg, 2006, pp. 235-276.

i.e., a common “client”, a common denominator on which to treat his legacy. And as we see, this task “encounters comparable difficulties of definition”.

10. At the inception of his literary career Ivanov, recognizing this “comparable difficulty,” divided this task into two separate procedures. He decided to analyze the material textual evidence of thoughts philologically, and to build a faithful symbolic synthesis of his own resulting insights. And that synthetic knowledge (*vedenie*) can best be rendered metaphorically, i. e., poetically. A diary entry of April 1902, clarifies Ivanov’s double approach.

I am reading St Bernard [of Clairvaux]. I would like to establish that connection among the Mother of God, the “Tree of Life”, the World in the New Testament – in the Gospels – it has a special mysterious and concrete meaning, and that must be also philologically researched. And so, [I must] say in a lyrical form, in a series of sonnets what I know (not with the knowledge that can be expressed in prose), about undying Paradise and the Tree of Life, about the World and Virginité, de Mariano Civitatis Dei semine et fulcro! (II, 771).<sup>15</sup>

Religion does not need poetry; but profound poetry is fuelled by religion. And, for some poets, making such poetry serves also an autodidactic purpose. Articulating important ideas in his “best words in best order” helps the author to digest, clarify, and assimilate mystical messages chosen from trusted sources.<sup>16</sup> This form of intertextuality integrates the halo of chosen authors in the new compositions, and ensconces the composition in a venerable tradition.

Ivanov employed various techniques of saying the unsayable “in a series of sonnets” in his cycle of sonnets entitled *Rosarium* (Book Five in his main

---

<sup>15</sup> Like any physical object, inscriptions and effigies potentially attest to their age, their provenance and functions. The invisible latent attributive capacity of their distinguishing features depends on the extrapolator’s success in realizing their functionality. Study with master archeologists convinced Ivanov that philological and intuitive determination of real truth behind mystical symbols is ultimately possible. His “Mystical realism,” approaches to this end await a concerted specialist attention. The realization of his “mystical realism,” his view of the affinity between ritualistic and artistic performances and the distinction between private and communal worship still await a concerted attention of specialists.

<sup>16</sup> Ivanov’s paraphrase or, rather, translation from the Greek of the common Church Slavic Prayer to the Holy Spirit as the last ode in the Epilogue of his melopea *Chelovek* (Man) suggests such an auto didactic motive. (Pushkin did, similarly, a paraphrase of the well known Lenten prayer “O Lord, ruler of my Life” – *Otsy pustynniki I zhony neporochny*, 1828). These superb stylists certainly knew that they are not improving the originals; nor did they attempt to translate them into vernacular Russian. It would be hard to suggest other reasons why they needed to mobilize their skills to integrate these texts into their own solemnity.

collection *Cor Ardens*, 1912). Each of the seventeen sonnets expounds on the manifold symbol "Rose" from a different angle of plot, setting, and set of referents.<sup>17</sup>

11. Ivanov resorted to a number of turns of thought that startled conventional thinkers. His chief lyrical work, the four part melopea *Chelovek* (*Man*, 1915-1939) is a notable example. The symmetry of its strophic arrangement is one of the ways to convey the supra-segmental cohesion of the imaginary dialogue between Man and his Creator.

In Part One, a series of meloses [cantos] marked by Greek letters encounters a parallel series of proportionally structured anti meloses establishing a proposition / reply order [indicated by the same lettering]. In Parts Two and Four, the ascending series of odes, after reaching their apex, are succeeded by a descending ode, so that each melos and its anti-melos find themselves on the same rank. The "circular song" of Part Three forms naturally a wreath of [fifteen] sonnets. The circular view of the Epilogue is narrated in nine epic octaves.<sup>18</sup>

Ivanov explains opposite mental motion and counter motion in an annotation to his long poem *Son Melampa* (Melampus' Dream, 1907):

The Greek terms *roya* (literally "current") and *antirroya* (counter current) are *termini technici* introduced by me to lay out my conception of signifying the first [instance], the current of causality, perceived by us in temporal consistency of moving from the past to the future; the second, encountered, current of causality is not directly apperceived by us, but we postulate it as the motion from the future into the past. Every phenomenon is as much conditioned by the connection of phenomena that follow it in time as by the expediency of phenomena which preceded it. [...] I identify the concept of *Antirroya* with the concept of expediency only conditionally, and prefer to define the former simply as encountered causality (II, 300).

A sophisticated application of this conception can be detected in the role Ivanov assigned to the caesura of his sonnet originally entitled *Apollini* (II, 352-353). The vertical division of the text into left and right columns allows reading the hemistichs on each side as a separate continuum. The left (two foot) side of each line concisely states the elements of the poem's object – the formation of Hymns. It represents the current of the author's spiritual ascent. The (three footed) right column describes in transparent metaphors the depressing causes (death and darkness, brightened by memory) of these consti-

---

<sup>17</sup> II, 490-499. Ivanov's own commentary on his Rosarium opens with the reminder that "Rose has a special meaning in the legend of St Francis of Assisi, and that Dante's *Paradiso* unfolds the symbolics of the Rose" (SS, II, 912-914).

<sup>18</sup> V. Ivanov, *Chelovek*, reprint of 1939 Paris edition, Moscow, 2006, p. 101.

tuent. The textual contiguity of all emistichs in all stanzas presents them as a *simultaneous* awareness of the opposite currents.<sup>19</sup>

The above-cited quotation from his diary shows also why Ivanov's rich intertextuality became notoriously daunting. His works name, or allude to, widely known sources like the Gospels, Plato or Dante, but not to his less familiar intermediate sources, so as to avoid having their mass obscure the *form* of his presentation by overcrowding it. Very rarely, Ivanov appended to his texts minimal notes, vexing serious readers. He did so, lest they become sidetracked from the main line of his message and its thaumaturgic powers.

12. Enormous erudition allowed Ivanov to synthesize highly dissimilar traditions of outlook, style, setting, plot, and symbols. It allowed him also to demonstrate, in tightly packed single structures, the presence of great minds, implying, thereby, their sanctions of his given projects. As in St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice or St. Basil's in Moscow, extraordinary intertextuality, defying traditional norms of artistic economy and unity still asserts an inimitably splendid organization. But even artful density can appear to be needless by usual standards of lyrical confessions. To readers, Ivanov's super-loaded compactness seemed to obscure the objective of his writings. The close interdependence between his poems and his scholarly writings attests to his awareness of this fact and of his struggle to determine his intricate objective. Yet, his learned essays on creative ascent and descent leave the description of the spiritual goal to his poems, while the ornate metaphoric verses, crave, in turn, for elucidation. The multitude of supporting named and unnamed sources crowds, even after drastic filtering, his poems and essays with allusions to their original contexts. Their sum points to the enormity of the *realiora* "cloud". Its richness is, indeed, much greater than what a single mind can carry. (This, by the way, is one of the reasons why Ivanov's lines are very difficult to memorize or to set to music). So, where, then, is the lyrical ego and Ivanov's own spiritual world? Where, exactly is Ivanov?

13. The above questions miss the point of Ivanov's oft-quoted Augustinian imperative *transcende te ipsum* calling for a spiritual ascent toward the infinite freedom of the eternal *realiora*. Ivanov caused this oversight by not recording his reflections on, for example, the writings of medieval Church Fathers whom he read upon coming to Italy.<sup>20</sup> He, thus, did not refer to St

---

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed analysis of this technique applied in this sonnet see Denis Mickiewicz, *Otkrovenie tsesury*, Otechestvennoe stikhovedenie, Philological Faculty, St. Petersburg University, November 2010, pp. 116-129.

<sup>20</sup> During his Moscow years, Ivanov defended their thoughts orally with his Orthodox theologian friends Vladimir Ernst, Sergey Bulgakov and Pavel Florovskii. These long discus-

Bernard, and barely alluded to St Bonaventura's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (1295). This concise treatise written by the follower of St. Augustine for his the Franciscan brethren lays out in detail the intellectual steps of Ivanov's key principle of *ascent*.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike the great mystics, Ivanov stops his descriptions of the ascent, before reaching the top of Jacob's Ladder, within the indubitable indubitable human chef-d'œuvres that are "mirrors through which individuals may pass to God" (see note 22). Citing models, his readers would recall, sufficed for an authoritative basis to discuss *everyone's* possible ascent. It is the observable determination "to strive relentlessly toward the Supreme Being" (Goethe, *Faust Two*, Part One) that matters. Respecting each individual's freedom to specify that Being according to his or her own belief, Goethe and, after him, Ivanov, refrain from delving into eschatology or into their own experiences. Their restraint is enhanced by their deference to different perceptions of the Absolute among their high predecessors (*die hohen Ahnen*). Predictably, Dante's *Paradiso* stands as the highest example, while King David's Psalms, Homer's epics and Greek tragedies are the font of intercultural humanism.

Individual symbols of a spiritual state present a micro analogy of the semantic structure of complete works. The polysemy of a word constructs similarly complex structures.<sup>22</sup> Dante refers to his use of this technique in his letter to his patron Can Grande di Verona. Ivanov, too, is quite exacting in his stylistic morphology. He invented a special quasi-archaic speech to sepa-

---

sions anticipated his eventual conversion, in 1926, to Roman Catholicism, and his retention of loyalty to Byzantine and Early Slavic Eastern Orthodoxy.

<sup>21</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> paragraph in Chapter One reads "Since, then, one must climb Jacobs ladder before descending it, let us place the first step of the ascent far down, putting the whole of this sensible world before us as it were a mirror through which we may pass to God." "In Deum" can also be translated with the preposition "into God" meaning God's Imperium, meaning the unfathomable magnitude of His eternal omnipresence. Bonaventura di Bagnoregio, *The Journey of the mind to God (Itinerarium Menis in Deum)*, Philadelphia, 1957, Vol. XIII, p. 47. The formative impact of Roman Church Fathers on Ivanov's world view and creativity also awaits extensive exploration. An example of extensive scrutiny of his Eastern sources is A.L. Toporkov's recent book *Istochniki "Povesti o Svetomire Tsareviche" Viacheslava Ivanova: drevn'aya i srednevekovaia knizhnost' i fol'klor*. Moskva, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Ivanov coined polysemous neologisms almost as fondly as did the futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov and the story teller Aleksey Remizov. See D. Mickiewicz, *Semantic Functions in Zaum'*, Russian Literature, XV-4 (1984), Special May Issue, pp. 363-464; S. Aronian, *The Dream as a Literary Device in the Novels and Short Stories of Aleksej Remizov*, PhD dissertation, Yale university, 1971.

rate his messages from ordinary discourse and deliver certain nuances of antique wisdom. Set in contexts with other lexemes, symbols obtain dozens of semantic specificity, suggesting a variety of acts and settings. They also conjure up historical situations, landscapes, and mystical or lyrical moods. Symbols can freely travel intertextually as metaphysical constructs, arouse gamuts of strong emotions, and affect, as well as reflect, the spirit of Man.

14. When, toward the end of his stay in Petersburg, Ivanov's disciples decided to rebel against symbolist, i.e. his, poetics, the master repeatedly insisted that no one is obliged to be a symbolist. Symbolism, to him, is not a sect, a coterie like the French school at *fin de siècle*, but an ageless technique of exercising the links between religious or clairvoyant illumination and artistic representation. It is the main aid for revealing Man's spiritual experience of whatever orientation, which is the "true goal of all art."

The only task, the only subject of all art is Man. However not the utility of Man, but his mystery. <...> This is why religion always fitted into the "Grand Style" of true art; for God is on the vertical of Man. What does not fit into it is just worldly utility, situated in the human horizontal, and the yearning for utilitarianism immediately puts a stop to all artistic action. The closer we peer into the essence of heresies, the more obvious will become the verity of correct aesthetic confession (II, 614).<sup>23</sup>

The harshness of the above conclusion reflects Ivanov's frustration that even his best disciples failed to see the optimal freedom allowed in his doctrine of *realiora in rebus* in symbolist poetry. Ivanov's devoted his rigorous logic to the defense of that creative freedom. It was not, as many suspected, a tyrannical order to profess his, Ivanov's, personal beliefs.

15. For Ivanov, myths are a natural agent of world-wide transcendental communication. They functionally combine noumenal events and phenomenal appearances, deep truth and fantastic depiction. As depositories of racial memory, myths forever reflect the essence of lives long ago extinct. Sometimes, they are the only record of historic events, and, occasionally, their hypothetical facts were supported by archeological findings. (This was the age of Heinrich Schliemann and Sir Arthur Evans). Technically, myths are extensions of symbols. Adding a predicative function to a symbol creates a myth. "A myth is the dynamic modus of symbol" (II, 594-595). As symbols, (e.g. a "snake"), traversing all levels of our consciousness, acquire different

---

<sup>23</sup> Ivanov wrote these polemic lines shortly before the First World War, when the younger generation of Petersburg intelligentsia (or perhaps of the hole world), embraced activist or epicurean utilitarianism. Realizing that his message, so obvious to him, does not stand a chance of being received, Ivanov moved to Moscow, where he ceased to publish collections of verse and, generally, wrote increasingly little poetry.

meanings on each intersection of facts and hypotheses and mythological plots. As these points of intersection extend into lines, a mythical plot becomes a multilinear continuum. Multiplex mythological narratives expand the symbolic prowess of their archetypal *ur*-myths to fit any contingency. This is why Ivanov recommends mythmaking (*mifotorchestvo*) to all artists, and especially to symbolists. And this is why all his works combine his own intensity with the general objectivity of mythological narratives. Decades of studying paleography and archeological artifacts with world famous mentors taught Ivanov to extrapolate multiple functions from the scant evidence of unearthed fragments. He applied the same rigor in aligning the scant objective evidence of his noumenal insights.

16. In Italy, where he began writing his first dissertation, Ivanov was overwhelmed, like all visitors, by the amassed traces of so many civilizations. Prodded by Nietzsche, he immersed himself in the artifacts of pre-Dionysiac cults to look for the human origins of what turned into a thousand year religious practice. In the course of it, grew Ivanov's innate concern with the perennial conflict between boundless freedom of the god and that of the Almighty Authority's universal order. To accommodate the discourse of this opposition, Ivanov invented a special hermeneutic syntax, introducing into his texts new degrees of lexical valence which lends his phrases the status of a mythologem,<sup>24</sup> – something between a dictionary term, a metaphor and a theorem. And his rhetoric allowed him to foreground a given side, without forgetting the others. The psychological parameter of the significance of myths, like that of worships and inspiration, exceeds purely historical parameters. Mythic encapsulation of hyperbolic experiences in universally transferable plots attest to mankind's mnemonic capacity and its everlasting psychological commonality.

Myths pervade primitive as well as sophisticated civilizations. Transfusing the past into the future and the future into the past, they dramatize particular moral and behavioral dilemmas and magnify specific states of mind, like nightmares, glory, heroism, death, rebirth, calamities or splendor, hate or love, etc. These experiences, encapsuled in universal mythologems, dictate plots and spawn variant myths. Mythologems, focusing on hyperbolization often support ritualistic, didactic, artistic (and also propagandistic) action. This potency, close to that of symbolic functions, prompted Ivanov to recommend

---

<sup>24</sup> K. Isupov, *Tragedia simvolizma*, Siedlice 2012, p. 18. Ivanov enjoyed referring to the bold leaps of thought attributed to the legendary bard and seer Bayan in the famous twelfth-century *Tale of the Host of Igor*. Ivanov's final unfinished utopian epic, *The Tale of Tsarevich Svetomir*, adopts numerous stylistic and thematic traits from this anonymous work.

“mythmaking” (*mifotvorchestvo*) as a felicitous way of making Grand Art. Mythologems build the scaffolding of great theatrical, operatic, musical, choreographic and visual art works. In Ivanov’s view, each emanation of intellectual initiative has its own dynamic energy and a special morphological principle.

17. Ivanov’s ceaseless juxtaposition of irreconcilably opposite but inextinguishable trends of the human spirit angered all ideological parties around him: – conservative orthodox, radical liberals, rarefied aesthetes and positivist materialists. Their predominant focus on either spirituality or on empirical reality narrows the dimensions on which reality is to be contemplated in its eternal and universal ubiquity.<sup>25</sup> Ivanov’s evocations of myths, like his tenuous conjectures, were often mistaken by scientists and literati for unimportant poetic license, without examining the legitimacy of their philosophic underpinnings. And the younger generation looked for the immediacy of direct tangible vitality of spirit and flesh, as opposed to symbolic abstractions in a super human dimension. (Cf. the manifestos of “realist, acmeist and futurist schools).

18. The fundamental causes of Ivanov’s alienation from contemporaries and successors are deeper than political, social, denominational or artistic. They stem from a categorical divergence in conceiving temporal and spatial dimensions of reality. This is an issue of general concern rather than of just his particular case. With the general erosion of faith in transcendental realities, Ivanov’s humanist efforts to extend the traditional veneration of spiritual contents of his sources lose their momentum. As re-conceptions of reality, generally, tend to “outdate” those of predecessors, relegating them to museum curiosities, he was “dropped from the ship of contemporaneity.” Such was the reception of heathen authors in the Christian age and, more recently, of the medieval Christianity of Dante. But it is exactly these instances that Ivanov sought to recover as true everlasting bonds of high civilizations. Certainly, each emanation of “intellectual initiative” has, as Ivanov said, “its own dynamic energy and a special morphological principle.” We now have a difficult choice: – to prolong the millennia–old universal reverence of the vary-

---

<sup>25</sup> For Ivanov, the perishable “outer garb” of things is by no means dismissible as unimportant; “The vey mask of Man is sacred, for it is also an *icon*, as is also his creation of the disguises which, too, are icons. Upon satisfying his natural capacities, man does nothing but creates idols. And when he thinks he is creating a likeness of God, he unconsciously depicts himself; and when he does so, he memorializes in the depiction also the features of Divinity which reside in him....” (V. Ivanov, *Fragment kommentaria k poeme “Chelovek”*, supplement, Moscow 2006, p. 12.



ing forms of a supreme “Primary Mover” or to split into special, empirically more evident activities and, ultimately, into solipsist self-referentialism. The alternative, – the rich contents of Ivanov’s quest for *entia realissimi*, and his symbolist realism approach,<sup>26</sup> may harbor an unexplored latent system that still awaits a comprehensive sorting and analysis. It would take a massive collaborative effort to study the contents of Ivanov’s works “from all sides” in order to obtain the necessary transparency to witness the coherence and import of his legacy.

---

<sup>26</sup> The morphology of this doctrine is recounted in D. N. Mickiewicz, “*Realiorizm*” *Via-cheslava Ivanova*, *Khristianstvo i russkaya literatura. Sbornik shestoi*, SPb., 2010, pp. 254-342.